

Radical Middle Way Transcripts



Eyeless in Gaza

Is there a
Roadmap
for Success?

A special lecture by **Habib Ali al Jifri**
part of MKMA's Roadmap to Success Conference

SUN 1st / FEB 2009

Al-salām ‘alaykum wa rahmat Allāhi wa barakātuhu

Let’s begin by reading the Al-Fātiha, the first chapter of the Qur’ān, for the souls of those martyred in Gaza and those who passed away to the abode of eternity amongst the people of belief.

[The congregation read Al-Fātiha individually in silence]

Praise be to God who created this creation for a wisdom, and rendered it such that not even an atom in creation - be it animate or inanimate - is outside of the divine wisdom. Blessings and peace be upon our Master Muhammad, the greatest of those of the people who guided others to God. And the most merciful of God's creation towards God’s creation about whom it was revealed *‘And we did not send you except as a mercy to the worlds’*. And may blessings and peace be upon him, upon his father Adam, upon the Prophet Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and all of the Prophets between them and upon their families, Companions, successors and those who follow their footsteps until the Day of Judgment.

God, glory be to Him, reveals in the Qur’ān, *‘And fear God (or be conscious of God) and God will teach you’*.

The meaning of this is that there are two types of knowledge: knowledge that we acquire through reading and through being taught it and that we learn from our life’s experiences and discovering the world around us and then there is another type of knowledge which is in reality the fruits of acting upon the first type of knowledge and it’s a knowledge that is of having the heart’s perception opened up and illuminated.

Knowledge through Action: the Prophetic Example

In a story about the Companions of the Prophet *sall Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam* (saw), it is said that one day the Companions of the Prophet came to him to complain about the state of hunger they were undergoing. Because of their dire straits and their hunger, they exposed their bellies to the Prophet (saw) and showed they had tied stones to their bellies in order to compress their stomachs so that it would alleviate the feeling of hunger. The Prophet (saw) then exposed his stomach and they saw that he had two stones wrapped around his stomach in order to alleviate his pangs of hunger.

Some of the people of Medīna, the Ansār, came to the Prophet (saw) with a container of milk for him to drink. The Prophet's Companion, Abū Hurayrah, who narrated this hadīth, had gone for three days without eating or drinking anything except water. The Prophet (saw) said to Abū Hurayrah who was with him when they received this container of milk, *“Go and call the Companions of the bench.”* This was a group of companions who lived at the Prophet’s time who had divested themselves of worldly means and devoted themselves to learning the revelation and living ascetic lives. The Prophet said to Abū Hurayrah, *“Go to*

them and bring them also to share from the milk.” Abū Hurayrah said, *“When I was going to them, there I was, thinking this milk is just for me and the Prophet to share.”*

So Abū Hurayrah went to the people of the bench and there were over eighty of them. And the Prophet said to Abū Hurayrah *“Give them all to drink.”* And Abū Hurayrah, at that point, despaired of having anything left to drink because it is a custom that the person gives the others to drink - the host - usually is the last one to drink or consume anything to eat so he said, *“I despaired of having anything left after they had finished.”*

I don't want to go into the details of the story. I just want you to take the gist so I can go onto why I wanted to say this. What happened at the end is that after Abū Hurayrah had given everyone a drink from the bowl, he noticed the milk was still the same as when he had begun. It hadn't diminished.

The Prophet (saw) said to him, *“Drink, O Abū Hurayrah.”* So Abū Hurayrah said, *“I drank some of the milk until I was full.”* The Prophet said to him, *“Drink some more O Abu Hurayrah.”* And he said, *“So I drank some more.”* And the Prophet said to him again, *“Drink some more.”* And Abū Hurayrah replied to the Prophet, *“I have drunk.”*

So for the fourth time, the Prophet said to him, *“Drink some more a fourth time.”* Abū Hurayrah said, *“O Prophet of Allah, I swear to you by God I am so satiated, I don't think there's anywhere for it to go.”*

Then the Prophet (saw) turned to him and said, *“I swear to you by God I don't fear for you to be befallen by or be stricken by poverty, but what I fear for you is that this world will be opened up for you, as it was opened up and given to those who preceded you in receiving a revelation and you will compete over this world like they competed over this world, and it will finish you off like it finished them off.”*

And he turned to the rest of the Companions and said, *“How will you be when the day comes that you will be served a course of food and no sooner than you had finished it, another course will brought to you?”* And the Companions of the Prophet said to him, *“Is that even possible O Messenger of God?”* (As in is it even possible that we need more than one meal a day) and the Prophet said *“Yes”*.

And one of the Companions said something that shows the meaning of the verse of the Qur'ān, *‘And fear God, (or be aware of God) and God will teach you’*.

He said *“O Messenger of God, are we better as we are today or will we be better then?”* The Prophet (saw) peace and blessings be upon him said, *“No you are better today”*. He said, *“Today you love one another and tomorrow there will be animosity between you. Today you are close and tomorrow you will be far from each other. Today you are united and tomorrow you will be divided”*.

The Prophet (saw) teaches us as he taught us in his life in one of the battles - which was the battle of Uhud - when the archers were told by the Prophet to stay in their position whatever happens, whichever course the battle takes and some of them when they saw the other side being routed, came down from their positions. And they lost; the tide of the battle was turned against them. And what the Prophet was teaching them then is that what happens to you in this world, in the manifest realm, is deeply connected and coupled with the states of the heart, ones intentions and ones behaviour.

Three points about Gaza

Therefore when we talk today about the Gaza Strip, I'd like to talk about 3 points.

“If we do not understand the relation between the state of our hearts and what happens around us, then we can't change anything.”

The first point is the state of our hearts in relation to God. I know and I understand and I empathise that when one sees blatant injustices, one sometimes feels it hard to accept any kind of talk except the talk of immediate change.

But I carry a trust which I will be questioned about when I stand before God on the Day of Judgment, and one which I must convey to you. And that is if we do not understand the relation between what occurs and the changes that occur in the night and the day and the changes over time, if we do not understand the relation between the state of our hearts and what happens around us, then we can't change anything.

What happened in Gaza in front of the world is a manifest injustice. The words that we have heard from many politicians and political figures who have tried to make the oppressor and the oppressed seem like they are the same, is something that cannot be accepted.

But amidst these clear injustices, the question that should be asked is this: What have these clear injustices given fruit to in our hearts apart from feeling angry about the injustices? Is the result that a seed of hatred for any injustices have been placed in our hearts? Has it left in our hearts in such a state that we dislike injustice wherever it could occur? Has it left in our hearts the feeling that we want to help and support anyone who is oppressed regardless of their creed, colour or race? Because if God looks in our hearts and sees such a state in our hearts, then it is the beginning of victory and change.

The history of our nation and the days of its victories, if you look at them they are all a testimony to this; that it is only when they stood for truth and justice regardless of peoples creed, colour and race, that they had these victories. For instance, when the Jews were persecuted in some of the countries of Europe in

the Middle Ages, in the inquisition and such like, it was the Ottoman Sultan, Sulaymān, who gave the Jews a place of refuge and country to emigrate to, under his protection. In that era, Sulaymān- he was also named Sulaymān the Magnificent because it was known that his armies were never beaten, and do you know why?

Because he took it upon himself to help people who were oppressed no matter who they were.

It is unacceptable that a Muslim would stand against an injustice when it is directed at him and remain silent when an injustice is directed at another. And this state of the heart, what is this state of the heart contingent upon? It is contingent upon having a heart that awaits victory to come from where? The reason I ask you this is because the state of one's heart, the reflection in one's heart, the contemplation in one's heart, the hope in one's heart, the certitude in one's heart of where victory will come from and where success will come from has an impact upon the coming of success or its absence.

When the new Muslims, who had joined the Prophet, were in a battle in a place called Hunayn, they thought that victory was contingent upon their numbers, they were beaten.

That is why I am not one of those people who expect that justice will be done in Palestine or truth will prevail in Palestine because Obama has come to power in America. Yes. Obama's coming to power in America is a victory for values that we hope will preside over all the Earth and it is a change from the state we knew previously which was a state where people's biases basically affected the policies that they would take so I was happy to see him come to power because I believe he will stand for values.

Yes. I liked the fact that he reminded the Americans, in his inaugural speech, of the principles upon which the Founding Fathers founded the United States because the problems with the world today are essentially to do with people's values and principles. Yes. We believe he will stand for justice in the world and we should extend our hand to help him wherever but this is different to what I am trying to talk about. The crux of matter is that the hearts of the people who believe in God await victory to come from God alone.

From God, from God, and no other.

We believe that the keys that bring this divine victory into motion - or the success given by God into motion - begin with our hearts. God reveals in the Qur'ān *'Truly God does not change a people,'* – so that's the Qur'ān talking about circumstances outside- and then it goes onto say that God does not change the circumstances of the people -and it continues - *'until they change themselves'*.

I would like everyone who believes in God here, in themselves and their silent

communion with God, to acknowledge that they had a role to play in the injustices that prevail in the world that humanity is undergoing today.

Every little lie that each of us ever said contributed to the injustices we see in the world around us. Any deception that any of us have done contributed to the injustices we see in the world today. Any injustice one has done to someone who works with them in their home – a maid or a driver; someone who is with them at work, someone to whom they are senior to at work - contributed to the injustices we see in the world today because the ego state of injustice is one state and its manifestations differ in accordance to peoples' positions in life and where they work.

God looks at the hearts of the believers and looks to see if in them they are certain that victory comes from him alone. The day will come when the believers can enter Jerusalem without anyone oppressing them or trying to humiliate them, glorifying God, entering Jerusalem without anyone humiliating them or trying to demean them.

No matter the politician machinations, no matter the accounts people take here and there, a day will come when the banner of truth will be un-flared in Jerusalem. I am more certain of this than I am certain that I am standing here today, in this country of yours, in this room of yours, in this hour.

But the anxiety that I have in my heart and the question I ask myself, is am I or you going to be amongst the people with whom God is satisfied enough to bring that day about because success is a divine gift and the victory God gives to people on the earth is a divine gift and its only given to hearts who carry something in them with which God is pleased; they carry praiseworthy traits in them with which God is pleased and are our vessels, are our hearts carrying those means?

“Have we imbibed the role our faith demands of us...being in partnership with people of justice, regardless of creed, colour and ethnicity?”

The second point is have we imbibed the role that our faith demands of us and our humanity demands of us in regards to our brothers in Gaza? The way a believer, a Muslim thinks is in itself an act of worship or a devotion to God just like his fasting or his prayers if he does it right- if he thinks right. It's unbecoming for a believer in God, a Muslim, to be egotistical in his calculations. It's unbecoming for a Muslim to think himself better and to put himself above other people; it's unbecoming for a Muslim just to think of himself and forget those who are impoverished and in need around the world.

We know of a tradition that was recounted of a woman of disrepute who would end up in the Garden because she showed tenderness to a dog, a thirsty dog, by giving it water that she was carrying in her footwear. And we also know from the traditions that a woman will enter Hell because of a cat that she abused and

starved to death. She imprisoned it so she didn't feed the cat, nor did she allow the cat to fend for itself; she let it starve.

Therefore the way one thinks, and upon which ones actions and the fruit of which are ones actions is itself a means of drawing near to God.

Amongst the victories that the oppressed people of Gaza were given, and amongst the defeats that the people who have oppressed the people of Gaza have suffered, is that Gaza is not longer a Muslim problem or an Arab problem; it is something that the whole world sees as a problem and as an injustice. This is something we must have in our perception. the people who are oppressed in Gaza, people who lost their lives in Gaza, their lives didn't go wasted.

We have seen on television Christians, people who do not believe in any God, and even a Jewish Rabbi, stand and say that they do not stand for this injustice. We even saw a Jewish Rabbi in London on television burning his Israeli passport, saying I cannot carry the passport of a country that would such an injustice. This is a form of divine victory to the oppressed; because the oppressed has a place in the sight of God so long as the oppressed person doesn't himself react and do something that makes him an oppressor himself.

We must work together with the other people in the Earth whose humanity has made them reach the conclusion that they cannot stand for such an injustice and they want to change the injustice. Our young people need to work with those around them whose humanity and whose hearts have reached the realisation that injustice must be stopped wherever it is in the world.

People must understand that it is time for all the lies to stop and that we do not have a problem with the Jews as 'Jews'. There is a Jewish Community, a historical Jewish Community in Yemen that to this day lives in Yemen and has all the rights of citizenship that everyone else enjoys. There is a Jewish Community that lives in Iran and has all its rights, and has been there, it is a historical community that's lived there for generations.

The problem is not a problem of having a problem with another ethnicity or anything else. It is to do with the injustice that has been done by a certain group of people.

Our stance is not against any group, or any ethnic group or any group of people. It is against injustice and we need to work together with people regardless of their ethnicity, regardless of their creed to change injustice. We need to work with anyone who wants to change injustice, regardless of where they come from.

When the Prophet (saw) called the people of the town of Taif, north of Mecca to the belief in one God, they ridiculed him and stoned him and pelted him till he had to leave the town and when he was re-entering Mecca - where the people of Mecca had turned against his call to the belief in one God and Mecca was his home town and the Prophet was someone who was give divine victory; before

entering Mecca he called on the protection of one of the people who was actually himself an idol worshipper in Mecca. He called upon his protection. Why? Because he knew the man was a fair man who stood for justice no matter who it was for. So the Prophet called upon him to protect him and give him a guarantee that he can enter Mecca safely. So being in partnership with people of justice, regardless of their creed is something that began in the beginning of our history, in the life of our Prophet himself.

“Islām is rooted in your hearts, it permeates your being, your love for your country, your citizenship and your duties as a citizen to your country.”

The third point is that we need to live the reality of our faith and we need to be honest in our public life and in our private life; to live the same faith that we truly live in our private communions with God. We shouldn't be people who have two discourses: a public and a private discourse. A private discourse just between us and a public discourse where will say what we think people want to hear. We should basically say it as we live it.

We do not want people to live an Islām that does not understand the world he lives in and that has not truly lived according to the true message of Islām – the essence of the message of Islām. Nor do we want the other extreme, which is an Islām that becomes a compromise and loses itself in compromising itself. We don't want either of these extremes. Yes, our faith has certain immutable principles and these are universal and unchanging and we will not change them to please anyone in the east or the west, and there are teachings in our faith that change with time because of the greatness of our sacred tradition that allows for these changes to take part of the changes in time and place.

The last concluding remark of this point is that you are all British Muslims. The meaning of that is that Islām, the faith that is rooted in your hearts, that is established in your being, that permeates your being and your lives should nurture this faith of yours should nurture your love of your country, your citizenship and your duties as a citizen and the love of your country and what you want to do you want to do to contribute to your country. The Prophet (saw) said that *‘loving ones nation is part of faith.’*

What you can do for Gaza, being citizens of this country, there's a tolerance for diversity of opinions and there's ways to bring about changes within the remit of the law of the land. It's wrong for a Muslim to mix up the mistakes his country makes with what he feels he can do for his country. Yes it was wrong for the British government to go into the Balfour Declaration at that that time.

But we hear voices like the voice of Dr Phyllis and people like her and I believe that in people like her, there is earnest want to make changes, to what is going on. What I heard her say today it is not the first time that I have heard her say it. I have heard her say the same thing in the media. People like that are a proof of the

fact that one should not generalise and look at people and paint all people with the same brush

We should act and we shouldn't just procrastinate because people need us to act and we should act in such a way that God sees the earnestness in our hearts and he sees that we are working hard to bring back the changes.

“Give what you can and God will replace it from His generosity. What we say and do should bring people together and not divide them; we were a nation sent as a mercy to the rest of the world.”

Now the last points - and these are actions points that one can take away and act upon.

The fact is that each of you has his own work that he does in his private life, each one of you is a specialist in his own field and has his own trade. Some of you are good public speakers; some of you are good writers so that you can make people aware of what is going on in the way we were talking about. We would like that to be turned into writings, into talks that you give; works you could write; we would like your work friends to know through you what's going on so that everyone can come together in bringing justice about.

But do you think that someone who cheats in his work, lies, doesn't do his job as he was paid to do it, doesn't do what was asked of him to the best of his abilities at his work, do you think that when such a person starts talking about justice, truth, and fairness, do you think that those words will resonate from them into the hearts of those who receive them?

Do you think that someone who lies in his work, who his work mates or his colleagues know to be a liar, to be someone who deceives, who is underhanded, who takes advantage of situations to get what he can out people without giving them their due, do you think that when such a person comes them and starts saying, 'there's a crisis in Gaza, there's injustices in Gaza, things need to change, it's not like the media portrays, it's like this, it's like that,' do you think that anyone is going to listen to him when five minutes before they knew that he was lying about something else?

In the East we had some people who walked out in a protest for Gaza and they started getting heated up and some of them starting breaking some shop windows and there they were screaming '*Gaza, Gaza, injustice, let's change things, let's change things*' and as he smashed the shop window he noticed that there were few valuable items on the shop window so he thought he'd grab them at the same time. Two birds with one stone.

Yes it is a just cause but the lawyer needs to be truthful himself.

Each of us should contribute what they can to alleviate the suffering of people. The doctor should contribute his medical skill by giving his time and volunteering his time to help people. People with money should try and contribute what money they can to help those people in Gaza. One should not sit there and wait for governments to do things or the business man or the philanthropist to do something, each one of us should give with what they can. Give what you can and God will replace it from His generosity.

The lawyers amongst us, the people who work in the legal system should work together and be partners with the people who stand against the same injustices, in trying to bring the people who perpetrated these crimes on other human beings to justice.

And we should work in ensuring that what we say and what we do brings people together and unites them and does not divide them and cause divisiveness to occur between them.

We do not want to say words that will agitate divisiveness amongst people. Palestine is a bigger cause than any organisation, than any party and no Muslim here or anywhere else should make himself part of the internal power struggles going on in Palestine. We are with the Palestinian cause but we are not with any party or with anything going on between the Palestinian ranks.

I warn anyone who thinks they can help the people of Palestine by perpetrating a crime or to think that they can help them by doing something vengeful and end up by killing people who are innocent, killing people with whom they have a trust, with whom he has a social contract, and thinking that by doing so he is serving the Palestinian cause. He has done nothing for the Palestinian cause, (he has done) quite the opposite.

In Belgium in the '80s, a Christian Clergyman and a Jewish Rabbi came together with a Muslim leader called the Sharif Al-'Alwīnī and they worked together to ensure that within the legal framework of the legal system in Belgium, that the Muslims were recognised officially. Belgium was the first country in Europe to give Muslims that official recognition. The Jewish Rabbi used to come on TV in Belgium and say that what the Zionists are doing to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is against the very teachings of Moses himself. And after there were television images of a certain massacre in Palestine, a young Muslim in Belgium saw these images of the massacre of the innocents in Palestine and felt angered by what he thought was a crime done by Jews and went and planted a bomb in a Belgian synagogue and which synagogue was it, it was the very synagogue of that Jewish Rabbi. Thankfully the bomb didn't go off and the media came to that synagogue and interviewed the Jewish Rabbi. And they asked him are those the people whose rights you want to defend? And thankfully the man was fair and was able to quell his anger in what had almost been done to him and his synagogue and said to them, *"No it confirms what I have been saying along;*

the oppression that those people went through... the only thing that it brings birth to, is the craziness that almost happened now."

But can we be people who can hold ourselves even when we are angered by injustices and not become, through our oppression, oppressors in our own selves?

We have to leave this hall and we have things that we are going to do. We have in our hearts we have to rely solely on God and know that it's only God who gives success and we believe that our bad deeds will only delay that success and we hold in ourselves and in our hearts; we stand firm in our hearts and resolute that we will see the world through the eyes that the prophet Muhammad came with and it was revealed to him and God said to him '*We did not send you- meaning Muhammad- except as a mercy to the worlds*' and this should be our perception of the world. We were a nation sent as a mercy to the rest of the world.

We should have a firm resolution that we will help oppressed wherever they may and whoever they may be and that we will not remain silent about the injustices going on in Palestine and if we see any justice done to any human being regardless of creed, colour or ethnicity then we should stand with that person and stand against the injustice being done to them, and we should understand that Palestine is not an Arab or Muslim problem. It is not just a Muslim or an Arab cause; it is something we share with our partners throughout the World of people of other races, of other cultures of other creeds who also stand against the injustices that we stand against. The same people who stood against the apartheid in South Africa have now made Palestine a global cause that the rest of the International Community needs to be involved in and we should not be content to let our oppression makes us into oppressors.

To the students, to the professionals, to the lawyers, to the writers, each and every one of you has a responsibility to make sure people are aware of this just cause. We will not allow for anyone to distort this just cause by doing something that is not allowed by our faith, by the discernment of the human intellect. We will not allow for any Muslim who thinks that he can give help to this cause to do anything that will involve doing any wrong to any other human being.

Lastly I ask you all to not forget to keep on praying to God, beseeching God, turning to God. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) on the night of the Battle of Badr when people came to finish him and his community off, even though he was shown signs by God that he would be given victory over them, he spent that night before that battle, in vigil, up in prayer, turning to God and beseeching him, saying to God '*Oh Ever Living, oh Ever Lasting, oh Self Sufficient*' and he spent the entire night up in prayer, up, supplicating God.

Let God see you standing before him, contrite with broken hearts, beseeching him and let him see certainty in your hearts that you know that praying to God and turning to him will change things. Pray that every oppressed person will be

given victory by God. We need to pray to God about the oppressor - you must remember this.

As Muslims we are not a community that hates the unjust person for his being, we hate the injustice. We do not hate the wrong doer for his being, we hate the action. We do not hate people's beings, we dislike the actions that come from them if those actions are wrong that or unjust. As for their beings, as believers, we believe their beings are created by God Himself and therefore as a courtesy to the maker. We do not hate the thing that He makes so we cannot hate their beings; it is the actions that emanate from them. So when we turn to God, we say to Him God remove the injustice and if we can get ourselves to that point and elevate ourselves, we should say *'God, remove the injustice but rectify the unjust person; put him right.'*

[Closing Du'ā]

About Habib Ali al-Jifri

Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al Jifri was born into a family of noble lineage extending in an unbroken chain to Imam Husayn (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (saw). Habib 'Ali is from the majestic city of Tarim, South Yemen. Nestled in the ancient valley of Hadramawt, Tarim has been a center of learning and spirituality for centuries. Habib 'Ali received a classical Islamic education from the illustrious scholars of Hadramauwt, embodying a methodology which crystallizes the middle way of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence, a respect for the differences between jurists and a spiritual education drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Habib 'Ali is Founder of the 'Taba Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research' based in the United Arab Emirates. He is also a lecturer at Dar Al Mustafa, Tarim, an educational institute established for the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Habib 'Ali is continually invited to lecture in many countries across the globe and appears regularly on a variety network television and radio programs.

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